

BOOK OF MASTER CELESTIAL SECLUSION

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TRANSLATED BY LOUIS KOMJATHY

HANDBOOKS FOR DAOIST PRACTICE

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INTRODUCTION

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序

BOOK OF MASTER CELESTIAL SECLUSION

The *Tianyinzi* 天隱子 (Book of Master Celestial Seclusion; DZ 1026; also DZ 1017, 2.4a-6b) is a Tang-dynasty (618-907) manual on observation and realizing the Dao. It provides a model for Daoist practice accessible enough that it continues to be used to this day by Qigong 氣功 (Qi Exercise) practitioners.

This text is part of a group of Tang-dynasty works on the Daoist meditation practice of observation (*guan* 觀) and realizing the Dao (*dedao* 得道). In addition to the *Book of Master Celestial Seclusion*, these include the following: *Neiguanjing* 內觀經 (Scripture on Inner Observation; DZ 641; trl. Kohn 1989), *Zuowang lun* 坐忘論 (Discourse on Sitting-in-Forgetfulness; DZ 1036; trl. Kohn 1987b; Cleary 2000), *Dingguanjing* 定觀經 (Scripture on Concentration and Observation; DZ 400; trl. Kohn 1987b), and *Cunshen lianqi ming* 存神鍊氣銘 (Inscription on Preserving Spirit and Refining Qi; DZ 834; trl. Kohn 1987b). These meditation manuals also relate to other Tang-dynasty works that could be labeled “Clarity-and-Stillness literature.” The Clarity-and-Stillness family of texts include the *Qingjing xinjing* 清靜心經 (Heart Scripture on Clarity and Stillness; DZ 1169), *Qingjingjing* 清靜經 (Scripture on Clarity and Stillness; DZ 620; trl. Wong 1992; Kohn 1993), *Wuchujing* 五廚經 (Scripture on the Five Pantries; DZ 763), *Liaoxin jing* 了心經 (Scripture on Realizing the Heart-Mind; DZ 643), *Xuwu benqijing* 虛無本起經 (Scripture on the Origin and Arisal of Emptiness and Non-being; DZ 1438), and *Xuanzhu xinjing zhu* 玄珠心鏡注 (Annotations to the Mysterious

Pearl and Mind Mirror; DZ 574 , 575). Of these, the *Scripture on Clarity and Stillness* is the most well-known and influential.¹

The *Book of Master Celestial Seclusion* is an anonymous eighth-century work that contains a preface attributed to Sima Chengzhen 司馬承禎 (*zi* Ziwei 子微 [Youthfull Tenuity]; *hao* Zhenyi 真一 [Perfect Unity]; 647-735), the twelfth patriarch of Shangqing 上清 (Highest Clarity) and author of the well-known *Zuowang lun* 坐忘論 (Discourse on Sitting-in-Forgetfulness; DZ 1036). According to Sima Chengzhen's preface, he received teachings from a certain Tianyinzi 天隱子 (Master Celestial Seclusion), sometimes translated as Master of Heavenly Seclusion, about whom he had no biographical information. He then edited the text so that it could be disseminated.

Another possibility is that Sima Chengzhen adopted the persona of Master Celestial Seclusion as a poetic device. Historically speaking, personal information on Sima Chengzhen is somewhat scant. He was born in Henan in 647. After receiving a standard literati education intended to lead to official service, Sima Chengzhen abandoned the pursuit in 668. At the age of twenty-one, he turned to the Dao and began Daoist training on Songshan 嵩山 (Mount Song) under Pan Shizheng 潘師正 (Tixuan 體玄 [Embodying the Mysterious]; 585-682), eleventh Highest Clarity patriarch. Following the death of Pan, Sima succeeded him as twelfth patriarch of the Highest Clarity tradition in 684, at the age of thirty-seven. He eventually settled on Mount Tiantai 天台 (Zhejiang), where he established the Tongbo guan

¹ Descriptions of these texts may be found in Kohn 1998a; Kohn and Kirkland 2000. On Daoist texts translated to date see Komjathy 2003.

桐柏觀(Cypress Monastery) under imperial patronage. Over the years he gained more and more access to and influence on the imperial household. This occurred at the courts of Emperor Ruizong 睿宗 (r. 710-713) and Emperor Xuanzong 玄宗(r. 713-756), with his first recorded audience occurring in 711 and increasing in frequency between the years of 721 and 730. In 724, Xuanzong had a monastery, named Yangtai guan 陽臺觀(Monastery of the Bright Terrace), built for him on Mount Wangwu 王屋 (Shanxi), Sima Chengzhen died there in 735.

Sima Chengzhen wrote or edited fifteen works, of which nine are still extant. According to Livia Kohn (1987b, 21-22), the extant works can be divided into four groups: (1) Geographical descriptions; (2) Works on charms or tokens; (3) Techniques on bodily immortality; and (4) Mystical texts. In the present discussion, the third and fourth categories are especially relevant. The third category, techniques for bodily immortality, consists of the *Xiusheng yangqi jue* 修生養氣訣 (Instructions on Cultivating Vitality and Nourishing Qi; DZ 277) and its variant edition entitled *Fuqijingyi lun* 月艮氣冲青義論 (Discourse on the Essential Meaning of Ingesting Qi; *Yunji qiqian* 雲笈七籤, DZ 1032, 57). Sima Chengzhen's texts emphasizing mystical praxis include the following: *Taishang shengxuan huming miaoqing song* 太上昇玄|萓命女少|至公頁(Commentary on the *Taishang shengxuan huming miaoqing* [DZ 19]; DZ 312), *Daoti lun* 道體論 (Discourse on the Embodiment of the Dao; DZ 1035), and *Zuowang lun* 坐忘論 (Discourse on Sitting-in-Forgetfulness; DZ 1036). The *Book of Master Celestial Seclusion* also falls within this category.

The *Book of Master Celestial Seclusion* may, in turn, be understood as a Tang-dynasty Highest Clarity Daoist text. The Highest Clarity tradition began in the 360s when members of the aristocratic Xu 許 family, Xu Mai 許邁 (b. 301), Xu Mi 許謐 (303-373) and his son Xu Hui 許翮 (341-ca.370), hired the spirit medium Yang Xi 楊羲 (330-386?) to establish contact with Xu Mi's wife Tao Kedou 陶可斗. Through a series of revelations from underworld rulers, divine officers, denizens of Huayang dong 華陽洞 (Grotto of Brilliant Yang), and former leaders of the Celestial Masters, Yang Xi described the organization and population of the subtle realms of the cosmos, particularly the heaven of Shangqing 上清 (Highest Clarity). These various celestial communications included specific methods for spirit travel and ecstatic excursions, visualizations, and alchemical concoctions. A wide variety of texts are important for understanding the religious world of Highest Clarity, two of the most important being the *Dadong zhenjing* 大洞真經 (Perfect Scripture of the Great Grotto; DZ 6) and the *Huangting jing* 黃庭經 (Scripture on the Yellow Court; DZ 331; 332; trl. Huang 1990). Thus, the early Highest Clarity tradition emphasized ecstatic astral travel and visualization of corporeal spirits.

By the seventh and eighth centuries, Highest Clarity became infused with Buddhist concerns and soteriological methods. In particular, in texts such as the *Book of Master Celestial Seclusion* and *Discourse on Sitting-in-Forgetfulness* we find an emphasis on the practice of “observation” (*guan* 觀), a Daoist adaptation and modification of Buddhist insight meditation (*vipassanā*). Buddhist meditation practice is conventionally divided into *śamatha* (Chn.: *zhi* 止) and

vipāśyanā (Pali: *vipassanā*; Chn.: *guan* 觀). The *śamatha-vipāśyanā* system became central in the Chinese Tiantai 天台 Buddhist system, especially as expressed in Zhiyi's 智顗 (538-597) *Mohe zhiguan* 摩訶止觀 (Great Calming and Contemplation; see Donner and Stevenson 1993). *Śamatha* is usually described in terms of cessation, tranquility, and concentration, while *vipāśyanā* relates to insight, especially insight into the impermanence of all phenomena, including own-being. *Śamatha* involves stilling and calming excess intellectual and emotional activity, often through breath-control techniques (*prāṇāyāma*). *Vipāśyanā* is transpersonal in orientation, in the sense that its ultimate goal is liberation (*nirvāṇa*) from the endless cycle of rebirth (*samsāra*). Insight meditation involves awareness and mindfulness concerning various psycho-physiological phenomena (body, feelings/sensations, mind, and moral/intellectual subjects). Under such Buddhist influences, earlier Highest Clarity visualization (*cun* 存) techniques became transformed during the Tang dynasty. In this context, “visualization” appears no longer to involve visualizing interior body gods, as in the *Scripture on the Yellow Court*; rather, visualization herein emphasizes completely beholding spirit in the more subtle sense of consciousness or “divinity.” Thus, the *Book of Master Celestial Seclusion* explains, “Visualization means gathering the heart-mind (*shouxin* 收心) and recovering innate nature (*fluxing* 復性)” (2a). That is, rather than meaning “visualizing internal spirits,” *cunshen* 存神 here suggests gaining insight into the nature and potentiality of spirit. Consciousness becomes more expanded or cosmic in nature.

The *Book of Master Celestial Seclusion* provides detailed instructions on Daoist meditation practice and mystical realization. Like its companion text, the *Discourse on Sitting-in-Forgetfulness*, the *Book of Master Celestial Seclusion* envisions such an endeavor as involving progressive stages and gradual attainment. The text consists of eight sections.

1. Spirit Immortality (*shenxian* 神仙)
2. Simplicity (*yijian* 易簡)²
3. Gates of Gradual Progress (*jianmen* 漸門)³
4. Purification and Abstention (*zhaijie* 齋戒)
5. Seclusion (*anchu* 安處)
6. Visualization (*cunxiang* 存想)
7. Sitting-in-Forgetfulness (*zuowang* 坐忘)
8. Spirit Liberation (*shenjie* 神解)

The *Book of Master Celestial Seclusion*, in turn, speaks of “Five Gates” (*wumen* 五門), including purification and abstention, seclusion, visualization, sitting-in-forgetfulness, and spirit liberation. The latter is the culmination of this training regimen.

² Reading *yijian* 易簡 as “simplicity” is supported by its appearance in other editions as *jianyi* 簡易.

³ The emphasis throughout the *Book of Master Celestial Seclusion* on “gradual progress” (*jian* 漸) recalls the distinction within the Chan 禪 (Zen) Buddhist tradition. Within that context, the path to Buddhist realization is debated in terms of “suddenness” (*dun* 頓) versus “gradualness” (*jian* 漸). The *Book of Master Celestial Seclusion*, as one might anticipate, takes a traditional Daoist perspective of balance, moderation, and gradual progress.

This map of spiritual realization differs in certain respects from the *Discourse on Sitting-in-Forgetfulness*, wherein Sima Chengzhen identifies the following seven-stage process:

1. Reverence and Trust (*jingxin* 敬信)
2. Interrupting Karma (*duanyuan* 斷緣)
3. Gathering the Heart-mind (*shouxin* 收心)
4. Detachment from Affairs (*jianshi* 簡事)
5. Perfect Observation (*zhenguan* 胃 觀)
6. Intense Concentration (*taiding* 泰定)
7. Realizing the Dao (*dedao* 得道)

Many of these terms are, nonetheless, utilized in the *Book of Master Celestial Seclusion*. In addition, “realizing the Dao” parallels “spirit liberation.” There is a movement from limited human being, with its various layers of habituation and dissipation, to a more all-encompassing and expansive immersion in the Dao. Through such attunement and alignment, one merges with the Dao, and in the process becomes an *embodiment* of the Dao.

The *Book of Master Celestial Seclusion* speaks of the Five Gates mentioned above in terms of types of liberation (*jie* 解). Purification and abstention relate to liberation through trust (*xinjie* 信解). Seclusion relates to liberation through withdrawal (*lanjie* 闌解). Visualization relates to liberation through insight (*huijie* 慧解), also rendered as wisdom. Sitting-in-forgetfulness relates to liberation through absorption (*dingjie* 定解), also rendered as concentration or stability. Finally, spirit liberation (*shenjie* 神解) is accomplished

when spirit pervades every aspect of being and reality in its totality. These various levels of realization may, in turn, be understood as conditions of the heart-mind (*xin* 心), which is also considered the abode of spirit (*shen* 神). At the beginning of Daoist practice, the aspiring adept is filled with emotional and intellectual turmoil. One abides in a condition of almost complete habituation; this is the agitated heart-mind (*dongxin* 動心). Turbidity (*zhuo* 濁) is extreme, while clarity (*qing* 清) is minimal. Agitation (*dong* 動) is extreme, while stillness (*jing* 靜) is minimal. In this condition, the adept must place his or her trust in the Dao, while gradually lessening desires and embracing simplicity. One in turn withdraws deeper into the self, engaging in more intense inward training and internal cultivation. Here the commitment centers on the internal (*nei* 內) over the external (*wai* 外). Turbidity begins to become replaced by clarity, agitation by stillness. As practice-realization deepens, one begins to gain insight into the nature of existence and the more subtle layers of the body-self. Here clarity and stillness become more constant than turbidity and agitation. The transformation of habituated, ordinary modes of being to more refined patterns of interaction receives a stable foundation. The Daoist adept then engages in more all-encompassing “forgetfulness” (*wang* 忘), forgetting personality, familial and societal expectations and obligations, as well as other forms of limited and limiting consciousness. At this stage, clarity and stillness become one's daily sustenance, one's constant ontological condition. This is the state of concentration or absorption (*ding* 定). One abides in a condition of almost complete realization (*liaoda* 了達) and awakening (*wu* 悟); it is here that the illuminated heart-mind (*zhaoxin* 照心) emerges. This is a return to innate nature (*xing* 性),

the heart-mind with which one was born. With clarity and stillness stabilized, one merges more completely with the Dao, and spirit, as the Dao made manifest, becomes all-pervading.

There is also some technical terminology that deserves mention. The *Book of Master Celestial Seclusion* emphasizes specific meditation-related terminology. One is advised to dedicate oneself to the practice of “observation” (*guan* 觀). The character *guan* 觀 consists of *guan* 雉 (“egret”) and *jian* 見 (“to see”). Observation is the quality of an egret remaining attentive to barely visible or unseen presences. Observation may, in turn, become one's constant way of being. One cultivates a calm and quiet heart-mind as well as attentiveness to various energetic influences. Observation leads to a merging with the Dao as Source as well as to the ability to experience and relate in more realized (less egoistic) ways.⁴

The *Book of Master Celestial Seclusion* emphasizes an understanding of the body-self (*shen* 身) in its various layers. The text identifies the following constituents: vital essence (*jing* 精), subtle breath (*qi* 氣), spirit (*shen* 神), heart-mind (*xin* 心), ethereal soul (*hun* 魂), and corporeal soul (*po* 魄). In the most conventional terms, vital essence, qi, and spirit are understood along a spectrum, from the most substantial to the most subtle or refined. In the later Daoist tradition, these three aspects of the body-self are referred to as the Three Treasures (*sanbao* 三寶). The character *jing* 精 consists of *mi* 米

⁴ Interestingly, Daoist temples and monasteries also receive the designation of *guan* 觀, here meaning “observatory.” Daoist temples provide a communal context for inquiry into the external cosmos and introspection of internal worlds.

(“rice”) and *qing* 青 (“azure,” but also “pure”). Etymologically, it refers to young or unprocessed rice. By extension, it refers to the essence of things. In classical Chinese medicine, vital essence is understood as a more substantial aspect of *qi*, and *qi* is understood as a more subtle aspect of vital essence. Here vital essence relates to the actual physical foundation of health and vitality: seminal fluids (*jing* 精) in men and blood (*xue* 血) in women. The connection between vital essence and *qi* may also be understood etymologically: *qi* 氣 consists of *mi* 米 (“rice”) with *qi* 气 (“vapor” or “steam”). Both the characters for vital essence and *qi* contain the component for “rice.” As vital essence is rice in grain form, *qi* is rice in vapor form. Through the “cooking” (refining) of rice grain, steam is produced; through the cooking of vital essence, *qi* is produced. Finally, *shen* 神 relates to “spiritual dimensions” (*shi* 示), omens and similar divine manifestations, and the establishment and attendance to such a connection (*shen* 申). Spirit relates to consciousness and “divine” capacities more generally.

Spirit is also associated with the heart-mind in its purer or original condition. Recalling earlier views expressed in the Techniques of the Heart-mind (*xinshu* 心術) chapters of the *Guanzi* 管子 (Book of Master Guan), the *Book of Master Celestial Seclusion* understands Daoist practice as ultimately connected to consciousness and spirit (*shen* 神), with particular emphasis placed on the ability of the heart-mind (心) either to attain spirit immortality (*shenxian* 神仙) or to separate the adept from the Dao as Source. Here the heart-mind is understood both as a physical location in the chest (the heart [*xin* 心] as “organ” [*zang* 臟]) and as relating to thoughts (*nian* 念) and

emotions (*qing* 清) (the heart as “consciousness” [*shi* 識]). Intellectual and emotional activity is a possible source of dissipation and disruption. In this respect, the *Book of Master Celestial Seclusion* also emphasizes the connection between the heart-mind and the eyes (*mu* 目). When the eyes are directed outward and concerned with external phenomena, the heart-mind becomes confused and spirit becomes disoriented.⁵ However, when stilled (*jing* 靜) and stabilized (*ding* 定), the heart-mind is associated with innate nature (*xing* 性), the givenness (*ziran* 自然) and the actualization (*xiu* 修) of one's innate endowment from and connection with the Dao. This return to one's original nature (*benxing* 本性) is the attainment of mystical unification (*dedao* 得道).

The *Book of Master Celestial Seclusion* also mentions other “spiritual” aspects of the body-self, including the *hun* 魂 and *po* 魄. The character for *hun* consists of *gui* 鬼 (“ghost”) and *yun* 云 (“cloud”), and is thus sometimes rendered as “cloud soul.” The character for *po* consists of *gui* 鬼 (“ghost”) and *bai* 白 (“white”), and is thus sometimes rendered as “white soul.” Under one interpretation, the association with “white” invokes the bones (*gu* 骨) and the *po*'s connection to the body. The *hun*, here translated as “ethereal soul,” is yang in nature. It is associated with the liver, the heavens, and thinking. The *po*, here translated as “corporeal soul,” is yin in nature. It is associated with the lungs, the earth, and feeling. From a classical perspective, both of these “souls” are ephemeral in nature. When the

⁵ The connection between the heart-mind and eyes in Daoist practice is eloquently expressed in Wu Yun's 吳筠 (d. 778) *Xinmu lun* 心目論 (Discourse on the Heart-mind and Eyes; DZ 1038). A translation of this text may be found in Kohn 1998b.

ordinary human being dies, the *hun* ascends as a spiritual entity, eventually dissipating into the cosmos; the *po* descends with the body, eventually decomposing with the body and bones. However, through alchemical transformation, these various corporeal entities are merged into a single, composite being.

The *Book of Master Celestial Seclusion* also employs various technical terms originating in classical Daoism, derived from texts such as the “Neiye” 內業 (Inward Training) chapter of the *Guanzi* 管子 (Book of Master Guan), *Laozi* 老子 (Book of Venerable Masters), and *Zhuangzi* 莊子 (Book of Master Zhuang). These include inner power (*de* 德), non-action (*wuwei* 無爲), and suchness (*ziran* 自然), also rendered as being-so-of-itself, spontaneity, or naturalness. Inner power, sometimes translated as virtue, is the inherent connection (*tong* 通) that one has with the Dao; it is the “nature” (*xing* 性) or “life-destiny” (*ming* 命) that has been endowed by the Dao. By extension, inner power is the overall manifestation of the Dao in and as one's life. The more that one maintains such a connection and actualizes such potential, the more one comes to *embody* the Dao as being-in-the-world. Here technically rendered as “non-action,” *wuwei* 無爲 involves a way of being that avoids contrived, artificial, or fabricated behavior. The more technical translation of *wuwei* as “non-action” encompasses this notion of effortless activity. In some sense, “acting through non-action” (*wei wuwei* 爲無爲) presupposes a process of purification (*jing* 淨), return (*gui* 歸), and reversal (*fan* 反). By purifying the heart-mind of intellectual and emotional turmoil, one returns to being through one's innate nature (*xing* 性), the heart-mind

with which one was born. This condition is *ziran* 自然, suchness or being-so-as-oneself.

Similarly, the *Book of Master Celestial Seclusion* speaks of the “qi of emptiness” (*xuqi* 虛氣), “sitting-in-forgetfulness” (*zuowang* 坐忘), and “returning to the Source” (*guigen* 歸根). The “qi of emptiness,” or “empty qi,” may be understood in a variety of ways. First, it is the qi that preceded the cosmos in its manifest or differentiated state. In this sense, it is the primordial or original qi (*yuanqi* 元氣), and is thus connected with the emanations of the Undifferentiated (*wuji* 無機) and Primordial Chaos (*hundun* 混沌). Another possible understanding is that “emptiness” is the quality of qi; that is, qi is subtle and mysterious, as though non-existent. It is not a “substance.” In this sense, the “qi of emptiness” recalls two influential passages from classical Daoism. The first appears in chapter forty-two of the *Laozi*:

“The Dao generated the One (*yi* 一); the One generated the two (*er* 二); the two generated the three (*san* 三); and the three generated the ten thousand beings (*wanwu* 萬物). The ten thousand beings carry yin 陰 and embrace yang 陽, and it is the empty qi (*chongqi* 沖氣) that harmonizes these. “Similarly, in chapter four of the *Zhuangzi* explains, “Make your aspirations (*zhi* 志) one. Don't listen with your ears; listen with your heart-mind (*xin* 心). No, don't listen with your heart-mind, listen with your qi. Listening stops with the ears, the heart-mind stops with recognition, but qi is empty and waits on all things (*qi ye zhe xu er dai wu zhe ye* 氣也者虛而待物者也). The Dao gathers in emptiness alone. Emptiness is the fasting of the heart-mind (*xinzhai* 心齋).“

“Sitting-in-forgetfulness” (*zuowang* 坐忘; lit., “sit and forget”) also originates in the *Zhuangzi*: “I’m improving...I can sit-in-forgetfulness (*zuowang* 坐忘)...I smash up my limbs and body, drive out perception and intellect, cast off form, do away with understanding, and make myself identical with the Great Pervasion (*datong* 大通). This is what I mean by sitting-in-forgetfulness” (ch. 6; Waston 1968, 90).⁶ In his commentary on this passage, Guo Xiang 郭象 (252-312), a representative of the Xuanxue 玄學 (Profound Learning) hermeneutical school, gives the following explanation: “In the condition of sitting-in-forgetfulness, what is not forgotten? First one forgets every residual trace (*ji* 跡). One also forgets that which caused the residual trace. Internally, one is unaware that there is a body-self; externally, one is unaware that there are the heavens and earth. Then one becomes completely empty (*kuang* 曠) and unified with transformation (*bianhua* 變化). There is nothing that is not pervaded (*tong* 通)” (DZ 745, 8.39b). Sitting-in-forgetfulness is a meditation method through which one cultivates forgetting everything that separates one from mystical absorption.⁷ This practice became more

⁶ In translating *wang* 忘 as “forgetfulness” rather than “forget” or “forgetting,” I am identifying “forgetfulness” as a hypostatization. As Michael LaFargue has suggested, “To hypostatize something is to speak of it as though it were an independent entity or force....Laoists [members of an early inner cultivation lineage] hypostatized the quality of mind they cultivated, for instance speaking of 'bringing about Stillness' as a mental state or quality, but also of Stillness as an independent force that is ‘the Norm of the World, (5 [45]: 4)’” (LaFargue 1992, 229-30; also 53-85; 243).

⁷ In this respect, it is also interesting that the *Book of Master Celestial Seclusion* speaks of “Daoist techniques” or “techniques of the Dao” (*daoshu* 道術). As Harold Roth has shown, this designation occurs somewhat frequently in classical Daoist literature (see Roth 1999, 181-85). Thus, one characteristic shared within the Daoist tradition is the practice of such techniques. One might, in turn, propose that an alternative name for Daoists is Technicians of the Way or Technicians of the Mysterious, with “mysterious” (*xuan* 玄) being another classical designation for the Dao.

fully systematized in Sima Chengzhen's *Discourse on Sitting-in-Forgetfulness*. The *Book of Master Celestial Seclusion* also discusses Daoist cultivation as a process of “returning to the Source” (*guigen* 歸根). This phrase occurs in the preface, section 1b, and section 4a. In the latter, we find a direct quotation from chapter sixteen of the *Laozi*: “Returning to the Source (*guigen* 歸根) is called stillness (*jing* 靜); this means returning to life-destiny (*guiming* 歸命). Returning to life-destiny is called constancy (*chang* 常); knowing constancy is called illumination (*ming* 明)” (also ch. 52). Stillness and emptiness create the space for numinous pervasion (*lingtong* 靈通), a return to the Dao as Source and unnamable mystery.

The *Book of Master Celestial Seclusion* also employs various terms from classical Chinese and Daoist cosmology. First, we find a number of references to yin 陰 and yang 陽. Etymologically speaking, yin 陰 depicts a hill (*fu* 阜) covered by shadows (*yin* 衾), while yang 陽 depicts a hill (*fu* 阜) covered by sunlight (*yang* 暉). At the root-meaning level, yin and yang are ways of speaking about the same place at different moments/ times of the day. Yin and yang are not “polar opposites” or antagonistic substances; they are, in fact, complementary principles, aspects, or forces. As the characters suggest, yin and yang are used to represent different dimensions of the same phenomena or situation. By extension, there are various associations: yin/ female/ earth/ dark/ heavy/ turbidity/ rest and yang/male/heavens/light/light/clarity/activity. In the context of a classical Chinese worldview in general and Daoism in particular, life is seen as depending on the mutually beneficial interaction of yin and yang. The Five Phases (*wuxing* 五行) are closely associated with the

cosmological map of yin-yang. The Five Phases are Wood (*mu* 木), Fire (*huo* 火), Earth (*tu* 土), Metal (*jin* 金), Water (*shui* 水). The Five Phases are the centerpiece of the so-called “system of correspondences” or “systematic correspondence.” Also referred to as “naturalistic medicine,” this system of correspondences consists of various associations, including phase, season, emblem, direction, life-stage, orientation, climate, orbs, spiritual dimension, color, flavor, odor, sound, beneficial emotion, injurious emotion, sense organ, grain, planet, tissue, etc. In this respect, the text also refers to the Five Flavors (*wuwei* 五味). These are the flavors associated with the Five Phases: sour (wood/liver), bitter (fire/heart), sweet (earth/spleen), spicy (metal/lungs), and salty (water/kidneys). The *Book of Celestial Seclusion* also mentions the Three Powers (*sancal* 三才). The Three Powers refer to the heavens (*tian* 天), earth (*di* 地), and humanity (*ren* 人), with the phrase going back to the *Yijing* 易經 (Classic of Changes). In the later Daoist tradition, the *locus classicus* for the Three Powers is the *Yinfu jing* 陰符經 (Scripture on the Hidden Talisman; DZ 31): “Heaven and earth steal from the ten thousand beings; the ten thousand beings steal from humanity; humanity steals from the ten thousand beings. When the Three Bandits are correctly ordered, the Three Powers (*sancal* 三才) are then at peace” (1b).

Finally, a number of other Daoist technical terms appear in the *Book of Master Celestial Seclusion*. The first is *daoguo* 道果, literally “fruit of the Dao,” here rendered as “culmination of the Dao.” This phrase refers to various signs or accomplishments (*gong* 功) that emerge during dedicated Daoist practice. For example, the *Haikong zhizang jing* 海空智藏經 (Scripture of Master Haikong zhizang; DZ 9; DH 73)

describes five stages of Daoist attainment as “fruits of the Dao” (*daoguo* 道果). These include terrestrial immortal (*dixian* 地仙), flying immortal (*feixian* 飛仙), self-contained (*zizai* 自在), without dissipation (*wulou* 無漏), and non-action (*wuwei* 無爲). The *Book of Master Celestial Seclusion* also mentions the practice of “abstention from grains” (*quegu* 卻穀) or “avoidance of cereals” (*bigu* 辟穀), here referred to as “not eating cereals” (*jue shi li* 絕食粒).⁸ Sometimes interpreted as fasting more generally, abstention from cereals, in early Daoist contexts, is associated with eliminating the Three Worms (*sanchong* 三蟲) or Three Deathbringers (*sanshi* 三尸), also translated as Three Corpses. Residing in the three elixir fields (*dantian* 丹田), the Three Worms may be understood as “spiritual parasites.” The late Tang-dynasty (618-907) *Chu sanshijiuchongjing* 除三尸九蟲經 (Scripture on Expelling the Three Deathbringers and Nine Worms; DZ 871) contains illustrations of the Three Deathbringers (7a-8a), wherein they are identified as follows: Peng Ju 彭据 (upper), Peng Zhi 彭質 (middle), and Peng Jiao 彭橋 (lower) (also DZ 817). Other texts, such as the *Sanchong zhongjing* 三蟲中經 (Central Scripture on the Three Deathbringers; *Yunji qiqian*, DZ 1032, 81.15b-17a), provide alternative names: Qinggu 青古 (Blue Decrepitude; upper), Baigu 白姑 (White Hag; middle), and Xueshi 血

⁸ Traditionally, there are five grains (*wugu* 五穀), associated with the Five Phases (*wuxing* 五行) and their related yin-orbs (*zang* 藏/臟). The associated “grains” receive different designations. One map includes the following: wheat (wood/liver), beans (fire/heart), rice (earth/spleen), oats (metal/lungs), and millet (water/kidneys). Under one understanding, when these five grains are eliminated, the “five sprouts” (*wuya* 五芽) or beneficial energies emerge in each orb.

尸 (Bloody Corpse; lower) (also DZ 303, 4a).⁹ These harmful entities depend on cereals or grains for nourishment and attempt to bring the human being to early death. By eliminating cereals, the Daoist adept aims at expelling these negative influences. On a symbolic level, one may also think of these “entities” as the harmful manifestation of the related spiritual abode. Under this reading, the lower elixir field (perineum) relates to either the conservation (positive) or dissipation (negative) of vital essence (*jing* 精). The “worm” in this case would be desire. The middle elixir field (abdomen) relates to either the conservation or dissipation of qi. The “worm” in this case would be various emotional and intellectual tendencies, with anger (*nu* 怒) being one of the most injurious. Finally, the upper elixir field (head) relates to either the conservation or dissipation of spirit (*shen* 神). The “worm” in this case would be excessive speaking or gazing. The *Book of Master Celestial Master* emphasizes that dietary restrictions such as abstinence from grains are only expedient measures.

The text also emphasizes the necessity of a chamber of quiescence (*jingshi* 靜室) as a practice space. Also referred to as pure rooms (*qingshe* 清舍/*jingshe* 靜舍), these are meditation chambers for solitary practice. Traditionally, such pure chambers were small, detached wooden huts where Daoists engaged in purification, ritual offerings, and meditation. Furnishings were restricted to an incense burner, incense lamp, petition table, and scholar's knife. The text also refers to this enclosure as a “chamber of seclusion” (*ju'an zhi shi* 居

⁹ With regard to the Three Deathbringers, the three elixir fields are most often identified as follows: Niwan gong 泥丸宮 (Palace of Nirvana; center of head), Jiangong 絳宮 (Vermillion Palace; heart region), and Qihai 氣海 (Ocean of Qi; lower abdomen).

安之室) and seems to provide a fragmentary description of its architectural characteristics (3a).

The *Book of Master Celestial Seclusion* conceives of this Daoist training regimen as resulting in a specific goal: spirit immortality (*shenxian* 神仙) or spirit liberation (*shenjie* 神解). Within the Daoist tradition, one way of mapping spiritual progress centers on types of “immortality” or “transcendence” (*xian* 仙/權). Etymologically speaking, the character *xian* 仙 contains the *ren* 人 (“person”) radical with *shan* 山 (“mountain”). A variant (僊) consists of *ren* 人 with *xian* (“flying”). Etymologically, then, a *xian* is a mountain recluse and/or an ecstatic traveler. One of the earliest expressions of such “ranks” (*deng* 等) or “classes” (*pin* 品) of immortals appears in Ge Hong's 葛洪 (*Baopuzi* 抱朴子 [Master Embracing Simplicity]; 283-343) *Baopuzi neipian* 抱朴子內篇 (Inner Chapters of Master Embracing Simplicity; DZ 1185). Here we find the following:

Superior adepts (*shangshi* 上士) who rise up in their bodies (*xing* 行) and ascend to the Void (*xu* 虛) are called celestial immortals (*tianxian* 天仙). Mid-level adepts (*zhongshi* 中士) who wander among renowned mountains are called terrestrial immortals (*dixian* 地仙). Lesser adepts (*xiashi* 下士) who first die and then slough off (*xiansi houshui* 先死後脫) are called corpse-liberated immortals (*shijie xian* 尸解仙). (2.1 la)

As time went on, this classification system and typology became developed and transformed in a variety of ways. For example, the late Tang-dynasty (618-907) *Chuandao ji* 傳道記 (Record of the

Transmission of the Dao; DZ 263, j. 14-16; trl. Wong 2000) explains, “The immortals have five ranks (*wudeng* 五等), including ghost immortal (*guixian* 鬼仙), human immortal (*renxian* 人仙), terrestrial immortal (*dixian* 地仙), and spirit immortal (*shenxian* 神仙). The celestial immortal (*tianxian* 天仙) is beyond rank. All of these are immortals“ (14.2b). As these passages indicate, the meaning of *xian* differs depending on historical context and the Daoist sub-tradition involved. “Immortal” suggests that such adepts have achieved some form of eternal life, while “transcendent” implies that they have “gone beyond” some limitation. However, one must keep in mind that “immortality” may not be “personal“, and personality may be what inhibits such realization. While a shift in ontological condition is involved, the *Book of Master Celestial Seclusion* seems to envision “spirit immortality” and “spirit liberation“ as transpersonal in nature. “Such a condition resides in cultivating our own qi of emptiness (*xuqi* 虛氣) and not becoming entangled in the mundane world. It is found in our own suchness (*ziran* 自然) and not becoming disoriented by deviant views (*xiejian* 邪見)” (1a). And with regard to spirit liberation, “When the four gates (*simen* 四門) of trust (*xin* 信), withdrawal (*lan* 閱), insight (*hui* 慧), and absorption (*ding* 定) have become pervaded by spirit (*tongshen* 通神), we call this spirit liberation (*shenjie* 神解). The meaning of 'spirit' here refers to that which arrives without moving and is swift without haste. It pervades the transformations of yin and yang and is as old as the heavens and earth“ (4b).

In the present translation, I have not translated the various notes attached to the text of the *Book of Master Celestial Seclusion* as

preserved in the Ming-dynasty Daoist Canon. In addition, I have amended the text to include a few sentences contained in the *Daoshu* 道樞 (Pivot of the Dao; DZ 1017, 2,4a-6b) and *Congshu chengji* 叢書集成 (Compendium of Collected Works) versions. For the most part, both of these decisions stem from careful reflection and an attempt to clarify the text's meaning. From my perspective, the short notes found in the Daoist Canon edition provide very few additional insights. The one exception appears in the first section, “spirit immortality” (*shenxian* 神仙). Here we find the following:

Pleasure (*xi* 喜), anger (*nu* 怒), grief (*ai* 哀), excessive joy (*le* 樂), personal love (*ai* 愛), hatred (*wu* 惡), and desire (*yu* 欲) are the Seven Deviations (*qixie* 七邪) of the emotions (*qing* 情). Wind (*feng* 風), cold (*han* 寒), heat (*shu* 暑), dampness (*shi* 濕), hunger (*ji* 飢), satiation (*bao* 飽), labor (*lao* 勞), and idleness (*yi* 逸) are the Eight Deviations (*baxie* 八邪) of qi. Abandoning these deviations is to complete (*cheng* 成) the accomplishment of immortality (*xiangong* 仙功).

An alternative translation of the *Book of Master Celestial Seclusion* may be found in Livia Kohn's article “The Teaching of T'ien-yin-tzu” (1987a) and in her book *Seven Steps to the Tao* (1987b), both of which include translations of the notes.¹⁰ The former also contains information on issues of authorship as well as on the history and content of the *Book of Master Celestial Seclusion*. The latter is a systematic discussion of Sima Chengzhen's *Discourse on Sitting-in-*

¹⁰ Kohn's translation of the *Book of Master Celestial Seclusion* was reprinted in her *The Taoist Experience* (1993).

Forgetfulness in the context of Tang-dynasty meditative and mystical systems. Both of these publications also contain detailed annotations. Information on the life of Sima Chengzhen may be found in Ute Engelhardt's *Die klassische Tradition der Qi-Übungen: Eine Darstellung anhand des Tang-zeitlichen Textes 'Fuqi jingyi lun' von Sima Chengzhen* (1987).

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TRANSLATION

翻

譯

BOOK OF MASTER CELESTIAL SECLUSION

— Preface —

The path to spirit immortality takes perpetual life as the foundation. The essentials of perpetual life take nourishing qi as the beginning. This qi is received from the heavens and earth; it is harmonized through yin and yang. When spirit is empty amidst yin and yang, we call this the heart-mind. The agents of the heart-mind during day and night, waking and sleeping, are the ethereal soul and corporeal soul. Through them, the human body is never far from the path to spirit immortality.

I do not know where Master Celestial Seclusion came from. He wrote this book in eight sections, encompassing the secret and wondrous. It covers topics not easily attained among ordinary humans through study and observation alone.

Speaking of cultivating and refining form and qi, as well as nourishing and harmonizing the heart-mind with emptiness, “returning to the Source” goes back to Boyang [Laozi], while “bestowing illumination” originates with Zhuang Sou [Zhuangzi]. Perpetual life and expansive vision also begin with these works. I have personally studied the Dao. Feeling compassion for people of the mundane world who often die prematurely without realizing perfect longevity, I wished to transmit these teachings to those with similar aspirations. I have simplified them so that they can be practiced and referred to easily. From Boyang to Master Celestial Seclusion, there has only been this teaching.

— Spirit Immortality —

When human beings are born, they are endowed with the qi of emptiness. Their vital essence and illumination are connected and awakened. When studying is not obstructed or hindered, we may then speak of “spirit.” Stabilize spirit internally, and bestow illumination externally. Through this, one becomes different than ordinary people. We may then speak of “spirit immortality.” Thus, a spirit immortal is also a human being. Such a condition resides in cultivating our own qi of emptiness and not becoming entangled in the mundane world. It is found in our own suchness and not becoming disoriented by deviant views.

— Simplicity —

The *Yijing* (Classic of Changes) says, “The way of the heavens and earth is simple.” What does this mean?

Master Celestial Seclusion says, “The heavens are above my head and the earth is beneath my feet. Opening my eyes, I can see them fully, without relying on any binding artifice to communicate. Thus, it may be said that simplicity is the inner power of spirit immortality.”

What path, then, should be used to seek this?

Master Celestial Seclusion says, “Without seeking you cannot know it; without a path you cannot complete it. Now, in studying spirit

immortality, you must first realize simplicity. If the teachings are involved, unusual, or cunning, they will only lead people astray. They will not lead to a return to the Source. Such is not my teaching.

— Gates of Gradual Progress —

The *Yijing* contains the hexagram Jian (Gradual Progress). Laozi speaks of the gateway to the wondrous. Humans cultivating perfection and realizing innate nature cannot expect sudden awakening. Instead, one must focus on gradual progress and advance towards it. One must abide in calmness and practice it. Thus, the gates of gradual progress have been established.

The first is purification and abstention. The second is seclusion. The third is visualization. The fourth is sitting-in-forgetfulness. The fifth is spirit liberation.

What does purification and abstention mean? It means cleansing the body-self and emptying the heart-mind.

What does seclusion mean? It means withdrawing deep into a chamber of quiescence.

What does visualization mean? It means gathering the heart-mind and recovering innate nature.

What does sitting-in-forgetfulness means? It means abandoning form and forgetting oneself.

What does spirit liberation mean? It means that the ten thousand dharmas are pervaded by spirit.

Thus, when you practice these five gates of gradual progress, completely realize the first before gradually progressing to the second. Completely realize the second before gradually progressing to the third. Completely realize the third before gradually progressing to the fourth. Completely realize the fourth before gradually progressing to the fifth. Then spirit immortality will be completed.

— Purification and Abstention —

Purification and abstention do not merely involve living on vegetables and roots. Cleansing the body is not merely bathing to remove the dirt. Instead, this method involves regulating food intake so that there is harmony and balance and massaging the body so that it comes to give off a radiant glow.

Now, a human being is endowed with the qi of the Five Phases, and consumes things associated the Five Phases. From the time one receives form in the womb, one inhales and exhales as well as circulates vital essence and blood. How could it be possible to abandon eating and still seek perpetual life?

However, people of the mundane world do not know that refraining from food intake and ingesting qi are only expedient measures utilized by Daoists (*daoia*). It is not the case that Daoists permanently stop eating cereals. When we speak of purification and

abstention with regards to eating, purification refers to cleansing and purifying our nourishment, while abstention refers to regulating and being attentive to our intake.

When you are hungry, you should eat, but never to satiation. This is what we mean by harmony and balance.

Do not eat anything not well cooked. Do not eat anything wherein the Five Flavors are in excess. Do not eat anything rotten or preserved. These are the basic abstentions.

Constantly massage your skin with your hands until it becomes moist and warm. This will expel all the cold qi. This is what we mean by making the body give off a radiant glow.

Refrain from long sitting, long standing, and excessive labor. These are the basic abstentions. They are methods for harmonizing and regulating the body.

When the body is strengthened, qi is complete. For this reason, purification and abstention are the first stage in the gates of gradual progress.

— Seclusion —

What does seclusion mean? It has nothing to do with living in ornate halls, in cavernous buildings, or on double matting and thick carpeting. It means meditating while facing south, sleeping with one's head to the east, and maintaining harmony between yin and yang. Light and darkness should be in balance. A room should not be too high. If it is too high, yang will be dominant and light will be excessive. A room also should not be too low. If it is too low, yin will be dominant and darkness will be excessive. This is because when light is excessive the corporeal soul will be harmed. Similarly, when darkness is excessive the ethereal soul will be harmed.

In human beings, the ethereal soul is yang, while the corporeal soul is yin. If they are injured through light or darkness, then sickness and disease will arise. Dwelling in this manner relates to a chamber of seclusion. In addition, one may consider the qi of the heavens and earth. There may be overbearing yang that attacks the flesh, or excessive yin that overpowers the body. How can one not guard against these?

If you do not follow these methods during the gradual advance of cultivating and nourishing, you are not according with the Daoist technique of seclusion.

Thus Master Celestial Seclusion says, “The room in which I live has windows in each of the four directions. When wind arises, I close them. When wind ceases, I open them. A curtain is suspended in front of my meditation seat. A screen is placed behind it. When it is too

bright, I lower the curtain to adjust the light inside. When it is too dark, I raise the curtain to allow the light in from outside. On the inside, I calm my heart-mind, while on the outside I calm my eyes. Both the heart-mind and eyes must be calmed. If either light or darkness prevails, there will be too many external concerns and planning. There will also be too many emotions and desires. How then could one calm oneself internally and externally? Thus, in studying the Dao, seclusion is the second step.

— Visualization —

Visualization involves visualizing our spirit. Imaging means creating an image of our body. Close the eyes, and then you will see your own eyes. Gather the heart-mind, and then you will see your own heart-mind. The heart-mind and eyes should not be separate from our own bodies. They should not be allowed to injure our spirit. This is the gradual progress of visualization.

Now, the eyes of ordinary people, to the end of their days, only perceive other people. Thus the heart-mind tends to become conditioned by the external. To the end of their days, they become grafted onto the affairs of others. Thus, the eyes become conditioned by the external. Bright and expansive, the radiance and illumination overflows without becoming inverted. How can such people not become sick and die prematurely?

Thus, returning to the Source is called stillness. Stillness means returning to life-destiny. Complete innate nature and preserve it—this

is the gateway to all wonders. Through the gradual realization of visualization, the accomplishment of studying the Dao is half complete.

— Sitting-in-Forgetfulness —

Sitting-in-forgetfulness follows visualization and is its actualization. Through it, visualization is forgotten. When acting through the Dao, do not see your personal action. Is this not the meaning of sitting? When seeing something, do not act based on your seeing. Is this not the meaning of forgetting? Why is this called not acting? It is because the heart-mind remains unmoving. Why is this called not seeing? It is because form is completely obliterated.

Someone asks, “If the heart-mind is unmoving, does one have the Dao?” Master Celestial Seclusion remains silent and does not answer. Another asks, “If form is completely obliterated, does one have the Dao?” Master Celestial Seclusion closes his eyes and pays no attention. This someone awakens to the Dao and withdraws, saying, “The culmination of the Dao is within me. What person is this 'me'? What person is actually Master Celestial Seclusion?” Thus, self and other are both forgotten by realizing that there is nothing to illuminate.

— Spirit Liberation —

The first stage, purification and abstention, is called liberation through trust.

The second stage, seclusion, is called liberation through withdrawal.

The third stage, visualization, is called liberation through insight.

The fourth stage, sitting-in-forgetfulness, is called liberation through absorption.

When the four gates of trust, withdrawal, insight, and absorption have become pervaded by spirit, we call this spirit liberation. The meaning of “spirit” here refers to that which arrives without moving and is swift without haste. It pervades the transformations of yin and yang and is as old as the heavens and earth.

When the Three Powers are combined, we speak of the changes.

When the ten thousand beings are made equal, we speak of the Dao and inner power.

When unified innate nature is realized in its original condition, we speak of perfect suchness.

Master Celestial Seclusion says, “I am born with the changes. I will die with the changes. I move in accordance with the ten thousand beings, and I am still in accordance with the ten thousand beings.

Deviance comes from unified innate nature; perfection comes from unified innate nature. Thus, through spirit I am liberated from life and death, movement and stillness, deviance and perfection. Among human beings, we call such beings immortals. Among the waters, we call such beings water immortals. On the earth, we call such beings terrestrial immortals. Among the heavens, we call such beings celestial immortals. When pervading all and completely transformed, we call them spirit immortals.

Thus the way of spirit immortality consists of five gates of gradual study. They all lead to a single goal.

CHINESE TEXT

中

文

天隱子

序

神仙之道，以長生爲本。長生之要，以養氣爲先。夫氣受之於天地，和之於陰陽。陰陽神虛謂之心，心主晝夜寤寐，謂之魂魄。如此，人之身大率不遠乎神仙之道。天隱子，吾不知其何許人，著書八篇，包括秘妙，殆非人間所能力學。觀夫修鍊形氣，養和心虛，歸根契於伯陽，遺照齊於莊叟。長生久視，無出是書。服習道風，惜乎世人夭促真壽，思欲傳之同志，使簡易而行。信哉。自伯陽而來，唯天隱子而已矣。

神仙

人生時稟得虛氣，精明通悟，學無滯塞，則講之神宅。神於內遺照，於外自然，異於俗人，則謂之神仙。故神仙亦人也。在於修我虛氣，勿爲世俗所論折，逐我自然，勿爲邪見所凝滯，則成功矣。

易簡

易曰：天地之道易簡者，何也？天隱子曰：天地在我首之上，足之下，開目盡見，無假繁巧而言，故曰易簡。簡者，神仙之德也。然則以何道求之？曰：無求不能知，無道不能成。凡學神仙，先知易簡。苟言涉奇詭，適足使人執迷，無所歸本，此非吾學也。

漸門

易有漸卦，老氏有妙門。人之修真達性，不能頓悟，必須漸而進之，安而行之，故設漸門。一曰齋戒，二曰安處，三曰存想，四曰坐忘，五曰神解。何謂齋戒？曰澡身虛心。何謂安處？曰深居靜室。何謂存想？曰收心得性。何謂坐忘？曰遺形忘我。何謂神解？曰萬法通神。是故習此五漸之門者，了一則漸次至二，了二則漸次至三，了三則漸次至四，了四則漸次至五，神仙成矣。

齋戒

齋戒者，非蔬茹飲食而已，澡身非湯浴去垢而已。蓋其法在節食調中、磨擦暢外者也。夫人稟五行之氣，而食五行之物，而實自胞胎有形也，呼吸精血，豈可去食而求長生。但世人不知休糧服氣，道家權宜，非永絕食粒之謂也。食之有齋戒者，齋乃潔淨之務，戒乃節慎之稱。有飢即食，食勿令飽，此所謂調中也。百味未成熟勿食，五味太多勿食，腐敗閉氣之物勿食，此皆宜戒也。手常磨擦，皮膚溫熱，熨去冷氣，此所謂暢外也。久坐久立勞役，皆宜戒也。此是調理形骸之法。形堅則氣全，是以齋戒爲漸門之首矣。